

MAGONIA Monthly Supplement

formerly ETH Bulletin

Interpreting contemporary vision and belief -----

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No. 11 January 1999

EDITORIAL

Magonia is a subscription magazine which appears only every three months. This supplement is freely available on the Internet and, being monthly, can be more up to date and provide quicker reactions to events. This publication continues the series started with *ETH Bulletin* and now deals with any of the topics discussed in *Magonia*, instead of being exclusively concerned with the evidence for the ETH.

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THE FITZGERALD REPORT

UFO researcher Robert J. Durant (email: 70232.17@compuserve.com) has sent me a copy of a new edition of a report originally produced in 1959 about a sighting at Sheffield Lake, Ohio. (1) Dr Menzel considered it sufficiently important to devote 10 pages to it in one of his books. (2) Readers of the Report are invited to compare it with Menzel's account. So here goes.

At about 3 a.m. on the morning of 21 September 1958, Mrs William Fitzgerald was lying in bed at her home in Sheffield Lake, Ohio, when she noticed that the room was illuminated. She stood on the bed, pulled back the curtain and looked out of the window. She saw an object directly across from her which looked like a disc with a hump in the middle. The object appeared to be of a dull aluminium colour and was about five feet off the ground. She estimated the size of the object as being 20 to 22 feet in diameter and about 6 feet high.

The object moved north across the lawn, gradually losing altitude until it was about 50 feet away and one foot off the ground. When it stopped moving, smoke billowed around it. The smoke came from openings in the rim, each of which contained about seven pipes. During the time it was visible the object made a noise like 'a jet engine warming up'.

It is generally agreed that it was cloudy at the time of the sighting, but there is disagreement as to whether it was or was not raining.

Mrs Fitzgerald's son, aged ten, also saw the object, his attention being drawn by the light shining into his bedroom.

This case generated intense controversy, centred on questions as to the accuracy of the witnesses' descriptions and possible explanations. Two Project Blue Book sergeants visited Mrs Fitzgerald to investigate the report. It was said that the light that attracted Mrs Fitzgerald's attention was a spotlight on a Coastguard vessel on nearby Lake Erie; there were other lighting effects from a train which was said to have passed the house at the time of the sighting; and the weather at the time of the incident was a misty rain with haze and smoke. The investigators concluded that '... the combination of moving lights, noise of the train and prevailing weather account for the illusion experienced by Mrs Fitzgerald'.

Mrs Fitzgerald's description of the UFO and its manoeuvres was fairly detailed, so it is difficult to see how she could have been so badly mistaken in her interpretation of what she saw. Much of the controversy centres on the fact that there were two main investigations of the incident, one by Project Blue Book and the other by a local UFO research group. The UFO group accused the Blue Book sergeants of carrying out an amateurish investigation and reaching a conclusion not in accordance with the facts. In the new edition of their report, Robert Durant goes even further. He was present when the Air Force sergeants interviewed Mrs Fitzgerald, and he says that one of them was drunk.

According to Dr Menzel, Mrs Fitzgerald had prepared a coherent account of the UFO sighting with the aid of the local UFO group. Regarding the interview with the sergeants, Menzel alleges:

'To the amazement of the sergeants, Mr C [Robert Durant] seemed to assume that he was in charge of the interview, answered the questions put to Mrs Fitzgerald, and continually interrupted with questions and statements of his own. After half an hour of this frustrating procedure, Sergeant A led Mr C out into the yard. In the house, Sergeant B resumed the inquiry and filled out the official report form.'

Durant's version of this episode is rather different. He writes:

'For the record, I was "Mr C". I did not answer questions put to Mrs Fitzgerald. A frustrated Sergeant A did not lead me out into the yard. It was I who, in my frustration, led him into the yard when it appeared that neither investigator had the slightest interest in looking at the place where the witnesses saw the object.'

'For the record, the Sergeant who accompanied me into the yard was plainly intoxicated and reeked of alcohol. We agonized about making an issue of it, or reporting it to the Air Force, but decided it was not the gentlemanly thing to do. (I am no longer feeling very gentlemanly about any of this.)'

According to *The Fitzgerald Report*, a drawing of an object very similar to the one seen by Mrs Fitzgerald appears in *Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14*, (3) thus tending to confirm the authenticity of the sighting. Menzel, of course, has a different interpretation. He alleges that members of the UFO group had shown her the sketch in the Blue Book report, before she prepared her drawing, assisted by an artist. (The Blue Book sketch is the one in the report marked Case VIII, Serial 0576.00.) It is very similar to the Fitzgerald sketch.

Unfortunately, Durant is unable to remember whether or not Mrs Fitzgerald was shown a copy of the Blue Book report at any stage of the investigation. Also, Menzel does not say who told him that the ufologists showed her the sketch in the report.

There is also much disagreement over the theory that the smoke seen by Mrs Fitzgerald came not from the flying saucer but from a steelworks about one and a half miles south-west of her house. The ufologists say that the wind at the time was from the north-east, basing this assertion on a statement by a Coast Guard man mentioning 'the sea condition out of the northeast'. However, this could refer to the swell generated by the wind on some distant part of Lake Erie. The weather reports from Cleveland give the wind direction as SW or SSW, as Menzel notes in his book. Menzel alleges that this meant that the smoke reported by Mrs Fitzgerald came from the steelworks.

This seems reasonable until you start to think about it. A plume of smoke comes from a steelworks chimney, pours down to the ground and, without dispersing, snakes along the ground for one and a half miles until it reaches the Fitzgeralds' back yard. It doesn't seem likely, and I have never seen smoke from factory chimneys behaving in such a strange manner. It seems to be agreed that the air was smoky and misty, but the UFO was only a few feet from the witness, and it seems to me that it is necessary to look for some other explanation if one wants to regard the sighting as being satisfactorily explained.

Menzel explains the noise heard by Mrs Fitzgerald as the sound of a train passing the house about 100 yards away, although she says in her statement to the local UFO group: 'The noise was unlike any I have ever heard made by the trains which run nearby.'

Menzel ends his account by quoting from a letter from astronomer Dr Thornton Page to a member of the UFO group in which he writes: 'As a scientist I am interested in unexplained phenomena, but the one or ones responsible for Mrs Fitzgerald's sighting is or are undoubtedly highly complex. It is just as false to say simply that she saw a flying saucer 20 feet in diameter as it is to say that she saw nothing, or that she simply saw the train headlight on a mist.' Page states that if ufologists insist that she saw a flying saucer, the onus is on them to prove that there is no other explanation of what was seen and heard.

As this incident happened such a long time ago, and in view of the disagreements between official and private investigators, it is unlikely that any general agreement will be reached as to its explanation. It could perhaps be useful, though, to compare the case with other, similar reports.

References

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2. Menzel, Donald H. and Boyd, Lyle G. *The World of Flying Saucers*, Doubleday & Company, New York, 1963, 279-288
3. Air Technical Intelligence Center, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. *Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14*, 1955

HUDSON VALLEY UFOS

Philip Klass has kindly sent me some articles and press cuttings about the Hudson Valley UFO reports and this has prompted me to take a closer look at them. It is now becoming clear to me that the reason why ETH ufologists are not very interested in these sightings is that they already know the explanation, and it has nothing to do with alien spacecraft.

The problem for ETHers is that it was quickly established that there were many amateur pilots in the Hudson Valley area, and that some of them had got together to practice formation flying at night. Their skills improved with practice and the number of aircraft in the formations increased so that they presented an impressive sight in the night sky.

Some of the UFO reports generated by these flying displays were quite impressive and contained obvious exaggerations and inaccuracies. Instead of conducting rigorous and critical analyses of these reports, the ufologists attempted to preserve the mystery by asserting that, while some of the sightings were of light aircraft in formation, others were genuine UFOs. They were helped in this by some witnesses who claimed that they could easily tell the difference.

It is important to examine these reports to see how witnesses and ufologists claim to distinguish between aircraft and 'real' UFOs. We must bear in mind that, as the objects were seen by hundreds of witnesses, there was no doubt as to their reality. This reminds us of Jenny Randles's finding that UFOs seen by many witnesses invariably turn out, on investigation, to be IFOs (identified flying objects).

One of the main distinctions between the aircraft and the UFOs was gleefully seized on by the ufologists. The UFOs often hovered silently over the witnesses. Light aircraft cannot hover and are not silent, therefore they must have been genuine UFOs. It does not seem to occur to them that if the aircraft were much higher than the witnesses thought they were, and if they were moving towards them, against the wind, then they could indeed appear to be hovering silently.

The authors of *Night Siege* (1) attempt to make many of the sightings seem impressive by taking the witnesses' descriptions as being accurate. They fail to take account of the fact that if you fail to identify an object in the sky, then you have no way of estimating how far away it is or how big it is.

An interesting feature of some of the reports is the irrational behaviour of witnesses in attempting to chase the objects in their cars. The car chase is a familiar feature of many action films, but this consists of one car chasing another. A car attempting to chase an aircraft, or any other airborne object, is an obvious absurdity. Yet the UFO literature contains many reports of cars chasing things in the sky, usually Venus. A curious feature of these accounts is that investigators rarely comment on the irrationality of such behaviour. A notable exception is Allan Hendry, one of the few ufologists who does not obviously have a few screws loose, who remarked: 'What amazes me is that people are surprised when they are incapable of chasing after an airplane in their car.' (2)

The main value of the Hudson Valley sightings is that they provide the opportunity for studying the development of the UFO myth in a limited area, over a limited time period. The stimulus which started and sustained the reports is known, and a number of witnesses have been repeatedly interviewed and the development of their experiences and beliefs regarding UFOs has been recorded. Some have claimed repeated sightings, and even abductions. The large collection of reports from this area provides a good opportunity for those with the necessary abilities and resources to devise a fairly precise version of the psychosocial hypothesis. However, the desire of most American ufologists to believe in ETs is so strong that this is unlikely to happen.

References

1. Hynek, J. Allen, Imbrogno, Philip J. and Pratt, Bob. *Night Siege: The Hudson Valley UFO Sightings*, Llewellyn Publications, St Paul, Minnesota, 1998
2. Hendry, Allan. *The UFO Handbook*, Sphere Books, London, 1980, 39

SATANISM UPDATE

Until shortly before his untimely death in January 1996, Roger Sandell provided information for readers of *Magonia* on the Satanic child abuse scare in Britain. However, he was unable to obtain details of a particularly disturbing case in Pembroke, south Wales. There was very little about it in the papers, mainly because it resulted in a trial which lasted for seven months, and the accused and the alleged victims could not be named for legal reasons. Now, journalist Byron Rogers, who comes from

that part of the country, has conducted an investigation and published his findings in *The Sunday Telegraph* (10 January 1999).

The story began in May 1991 when a local boy, aged nine, already in care for a year, accused his father of sexually abusing him. He was then subjected to 'prolonged counselling by social workers', as a result of which he told stories of orgies in barns, where men in gowns fired shotguns into the roof to ensure the silence of the children who were being abused. Goats had been ritually slaughtered in the local cemetery. The boy went on to accuse his mother and other local adults.

In June 1992 a 14-year old girl ran away from home and accused her father of abusing her. The man pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment. The men who had been arrested following the allegations made by the boy had been freed without charge, but the girl also started telling fantastic tales when 'counselled' by the social workers, with the result that eighteen children from nine families were taken into care and eleven men and two women were arrested. Six of them were convicted of child abuse, in spite of the fact that some of the prosecution witnesses recanted their statements. One of them said that she had been told what to say by social workers, who threatened her that if she did not say what they wanted her to say she would never see her children again.

On appeal, only one of the six was successful, in spite of the dubious evidence and the fact that few local people believe there to have been any substance in the accusations.

ODDS AND ENDS =====

Chthonic fantasies. For several years some British ufologists have been aping their American colleagues by indulging in fantasies about secret underground bases - some of which might even conceal aliens or crashed saucers, who knows? The custom over here is to return to this topic whenever there is a shortage of UFO reports; if you see nothing in the sky then look underground. Of course, there are real underground bases and there has been a lot of rubbish written about the one near RAF Rudloe Manor, a place with which ETH ufologists are obsessed. This base, intended to be a seat of government in the event of nuclear attack, has recently been opened to the media and pictures of it have appeared in the press and on television. The fantasy about the underground railway from Rudloe Manor to Downing Street probably arises from the fact that the Box Hill railway tunnel is adjacent to the base. A number of similar bases have already been opened to the public. At this rate there will soon be nothing left for the fruitcake tendency to fantasise about.

The maniac on the platform. *Magonia* No. 19 (May 1985) contained an article by Michael Goss entitled 'The Maniac on the Platform'. This was inspired by a conversation he heard in the London Underground about a maniac who pushes young women under trains. He discussed the folkloric implications of this story and concluded, ' . . . I don't think I want to believe in him. I prefer him as foaflore . . .' Unfortunately, it wasn't very long after this article appeared that a maniac pushed a woman in front of a train at Wimbledon station (south-west London). There have been similar incidents since. The latest incident, this time on the New York subway, occurred on 3 January when a young woman was decapitated by a train after being pushed off the platform at 23rd Street station by a man with a long history of mental illness. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 1999)

UFOtrash. Each member of the *Magonia* editorial team is equipped with a delicate scientific instrument, known as a Crap Detector. I should have left mine switched off when I tuned in to Channel 5 on 4 January to watch *Stranger than Fiction: The Great UFO Conspiracy*. No sooner had the familiar and, er, distinctive, features of Stanton Friedman appeared, and before he even opened his mouth, my Crap Detector indicator showed 'Overload' and its chips were fried, or whatever the technical term is. The other persons talking utter garbage in this programme were Wendelle Stevens, Bruce Maccabee, Nick Pope, Timothy Good and Robert Oechsler. Need I say more?

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